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## OPEN LETTERS

EXPANSION OF THE A. O. U. CHECK-LIST  
Editor THE CONDOR:

I always wondered why the American Ornithologist's Union did not live up to its name and include in the first Check-List all the species of *America*, that is, North America as far as the Isthmus of Darien. Of course I realized that at the time the Mexican boundary was a convenient division line, although merely an arbitrary one, because we fell over it into Lower California without much of any comment.

In looking over the zone map in the new Check-List, we cannot but see how vividly the whole question presents itself. It is only a question of another decade when the very nature of events will demand that our Check-List shall cover all of North America, and not merely a part of it. On the west, including Lower California as we do, we already parallel Mexico nearly half of its length. On the east Florida extends to about the 25th degree, and our country now has permanent possessions among the islands to the south. The Panama Canal Zone is permanently occupied and forms a natural boundary much more definitely than the Mexican line to the north. Ridgway, when he formulated plans for his great work, must have seen the handwriting on the wall, for he includes all this territory. As a forecast of what the future has in store, one has but to note the extensive work that is quietly going on to the south of us. The National Museum, through Nelson and others, has covered an immense section. The Field Museum, through Dearborn and Ferry, has invaded Costa Rica and many of the islands. The American Museum of Natural History is also in the field, as are an immense number of private collectors. Now our government has already taken steps to cover the Canal Zone completely; and this is only the start!

A decade or two ago the American Ornithologist's Union was a pretty small band, with a big proposition, spread out as far as the Pacific, before it. Instead of being satisfied with local growth, as many societies might have been, this same A. O. U. quickly grasped its opportunity and spread during this period until it is powerfully entrenched in every state of the Union. A more loyal group of ornithologists does not exist in the world! It makes one feel that this prompt response to conditions as they arise, will cause the men who have so safely guided the A. O. U. in the past to meet the conditions which are so rapidly shaping for a still further expansion when the next Check-List is published ten years hence. By that time most of the states will have published state lists each giving the status of every species within its boundaries; but a much more comprehensive understanding can be had of our migratory birds, if the territory of the

Check-List include everything north of the natural division at and including the Canal Zone.

What do C. O. C. members think of the proposition as a whole? You know the west has made the A. O. U. sit up and look, more than once. Why can't we start something going along these lines? Of course I haven't brought the facts together properly or fully; but merely touched here and there. I feel, however, that we are fast approaching a point where we can begin to agitate, and within a few years, at most, the whole thing will loom up as a necessity apparent to all.

FRANK S. DAGGETT

Chicago, January 5, 1911

## PERSONAL, TO COOPER CLUB MEMBERS:

In accepting the responsibility imposed upon me by the favorable action of the Cooper Club in endorsing my proposal for a cooperative work upon *The Birds of California*, I do so in full confidence that the members of the Club will really cooperate. Indeed, our very name pledges us to *Cooperation*. While it is true that any leader receives a large amount (often an undue one) of credit for any successful enterprise, it is still more true that all who help have a right to say "*we did it.*" That is just what I should wish for "*The Birds of California.*"

If, then, you ask me how you may help, I say: First, by publishing in *THE CONDOR* those interesting notes you have meant all along to send in sometime. Practically every observer has or has had unique opportunities in the case of several species. Let us hear about these soon, so that the results may be available for assimilation in "*The Birds of California.*"

Then, too, being a bit of a stranger, and having to make the most of five all too brief seasons, I shall appreciate any personal guidance afield which you may care to offer. I shall be especially glad to hear of any unusual photographic opportunities, whether of nesting or flocking birds. Please be patient here. I cannot always rush across the state to photograph a single nest, even though it be a rare one. But if your opportunities "stack up" at a favorable time, or if you are able to mark down something good for another season, it would be a great courtesy to advise me.

Those of you who use the camera are sure to have some choice numbers which ought to appear in "*The Birds of California.*" Don't be bashful. It's your book. On the other hand, if someone else sends in something better for final selection, we know that you won't feel hurt that we cannot use all of your material. We shall all want our book to be the best possible, whoever gets credit for it.

Of course you will let me put the business side of the enterprise up to you at the earliest

favorable moment. This will be a personal matter and we'll get to it all in good time. After that you will be a booster. All your friends know that you are interested in birds. May they not also know that you are interested in the success of the California bird-book? We are going to succeed, of course; but success will mean so much more to us if we can all share it. Thank you.

W. LEON DAWSON

*Santa Barbara, February 20, 1911.*

#### PUBLICATIONS REVIEWED

MILLER ON FOSSIL BIRDS OF CALIFORNIA AND OREGON.—Mr. Loye Holmes Miller is continuing his studies upon prehistoric birds, remains of which are becoming available in remarkable quantity through the work of the University of California department of Paleontology under the direction of Dr. John C. Merriam. Since our last notice of Miller's work (CONDOR XII, January 1910, p. 48) three more papers have appeared. In each case the well-chosen title gives a clear idea of the contents of the paper.

The first article deals with the "Wading Birds from the Quarternary Asphalt Beds of Rancho la Brea" (Univ. Calif. Publ. Geol. V, August 5, 1910, pp. 439-448, figs. 1-8). Contrary to expectation wading birds are found to be but poorly represented in the Rancho la Brea beds, located near Los Angeles. But five species have so far been found, and of these only seventeen individuals are represented. Fourteen of these individuals are referred to the subfamily *Ciconiinae*, which is at present foreign to the region. *Ciconia maltha*, not distantly related to the White Stork of the Old World, is described as new. The other member of the subfamily is the Jabiru (*Jabiru mycteria*). Of the cranes (*Gruidae*) both *Grus canadensis*, and a newly described species related to it, *Grus minor*, were found; and of the herons (*Ardeidae*) only *Ardea herodias*.

In the next paper Miller treats of "the Condor-like Vultures of Rancho la Brea" (Univ. Calif. Publ. Geol. VI, November 28, 1910, pp. 1-19, figs. 1 a and 1 b to 5 a and 5 b). The abundance of the remains of these huge scavenging birds is accounted for by the author on the ground that the Quarternary mammalian fauna in this region was abundant, remains of both herbivorous and carnivorous species of large size being numerous in the same beds. The asphalt furnished a trap for these beasts, and the carcasses of these in turn lured the vultures to their doom. The keen senses of the birds, both of sight and of smell, were doubtless effective at great distances, and thus toll was taken from a large area. The relatively large number of vulturine representatives might thus be in part explained. Only one of the four species to which the material is referred exists at the present time; this is the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*),

represented by a series of fourteen fossil tarsi. *Sarcorhamphus clarki* is described as new and most nearly related to the Andean Condor. Quite different from either of the above are *Cathartornis gracilis* and *Pleistogyps rex*, both genus and species being newly named in each case. These are of larger size than either of the existing condors; in fact *Pleistogyps*, because of its great size and the fact that it is represented only by tarsi, while *Teratornis* was described from skull and pectoral girdle, arouses the suspicion that it might, indeed, be identified with *Teratornis*. The author arrives at his decision to the contrary by carefully weighing the various considerations concerned with such a problem. The reader is left impressed with the conclusiveness of the author's argument. All the way through, the present paper is notable for detailed, osteological study and cautious but imaginative inferential reasoning.

The third paper contributes "Additions to the Avifauna of the Pleistocene Deposits at Fossil Lake, Oregon" (Univ. Calif. Publ. Geol. VI, February 4, 1911, pp. 79-87, figs. 1-3). This deposit had been previously pretty thoroughly exploited by Shufeldt. In Miller's paper, three forms are recorded, not mentioned by Shufeldt, and one of these, *Aechmophorus lucasi*, is described as new. A summarized list of all the species of the avifauna is given. This otherwise excellent paper is marred by numerous mis-spelled words, a feature doubtless deplored by all concerned with the publication of the paper, but due to a fortuitous lapse of the pen or mind to which no one appears to be wholly immune.—J. G.

NOTES ON THE PASSENGER PIGEON, by W. J. MCGEE (Science, n. s., vol. XXXII, no. 835, December 30, 1910, pp. 958-964).

It is not at all probable that ornithologists will regard seriously the statement of Mr. McGee that the Passenger Pigeon is still to be found in abundance in southern Arizona, in the extremely arid desert region between Nogales and Yuma. Had the pigeon sought the seclusion of the desert for a respite from incessant persecution, it is at least probable that some one of the numerous collectors that have explored the region would have secured a specimen at some time. Such has not been the case, nor did the naturalists accompanying the United States Mexican Boundary Survey report their occurrence in that region, though in 1894 they visited the exact spot where Mr. McGee claims to have seen the birds (Tinajas Altas). As he was quite evidently unable to distinguish between the California and Gambel Quails we are probably safe in assuming that he mistook some other species for the Passenger Pigeon.—H. S. S.

TRACY ON THE "SIGNIFICANCE OF WHITE MARKINGS IN BIRDS OF THE ORDER PASSERI-